E L D E R

# PAISIOS

1924 - 1994

## SIN BRINGS GALAMITIES

Η ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑ ΦΕΡΝΕΙ ΣΥΜΦΟΡΕΣ

## IT IS FASHIONABLE TO SIN

Η ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑ ΕΓΙΝΕ ΜΟΔΑ

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

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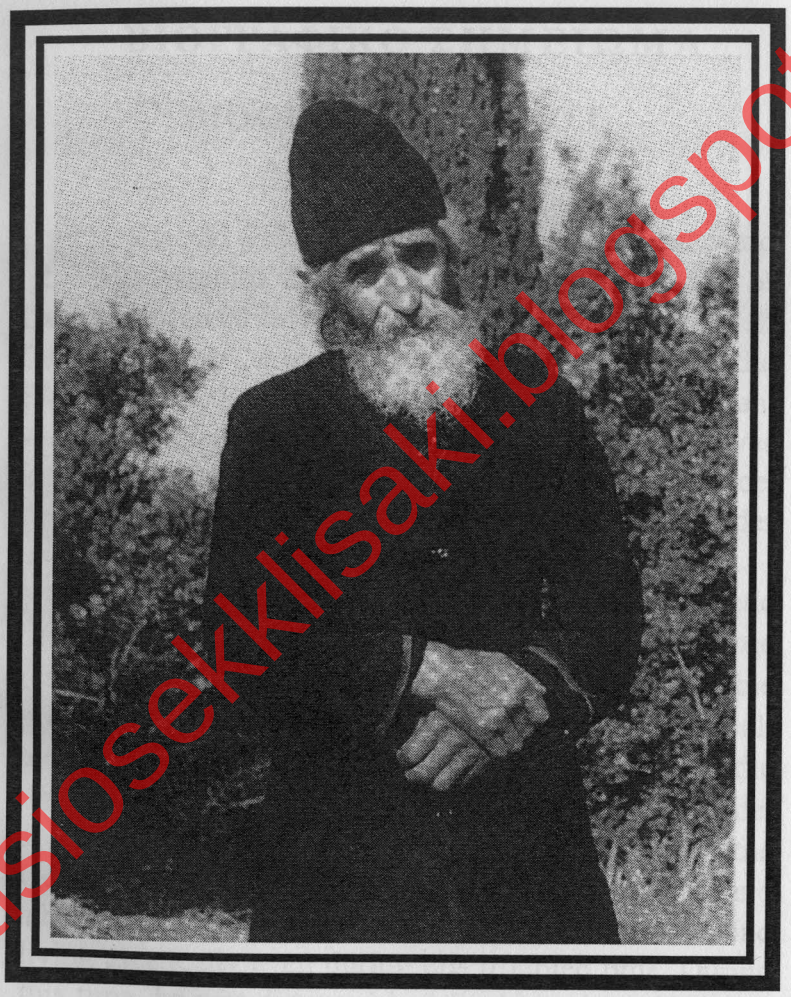
# ELDER PAISIOS
## ( 1924 – 1994 )



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**Sin Brings Calamities**

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# ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Blessed Elder Paisios, whose name in the world was Arsenios Eznepides, was born in *Pharasa* of Cappadocia on 25 July 1924. Shortly before his family left for Greece with the exchange of populations in 1924, the Elder was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, who gave him his own name and foretold that "he was leaving a monk in his place." Upon arriving in Greece, his family settled in Konitsa of Epeirus where the Elder spent his childhood and young adult years.

From the time that he was a child, he lived an ascetic life, and was nourished by the lives of the Saints, whose feats he sought to imitate with great zeal and admirable precision. He practised unceasing prayer, cultivating all along the virtues of humility and love. He learned the trade of carpentry, wanting even in this aspect of his life, to imitate Christ. He fulfilled his military duty during the Guerilla War in Greece (1945-1949), serving for three and a half years in the Army as a wireless radio operator, and living ascetically even during this troubled time. During this time, he was distinguished for his valour, his ethos of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and many other virtues. Having fulfilled his duty to his country, he entered the

monastic life, which he had desired from his youth. Even as a layman, he had divine experiences, but the favour of the Lord, the *Theotokos* and the Saints intensified during his monastic life. He led an ascetic life on Mount Athos, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa, and on Mount Sinai in Egypt. He lived in obscurity, giving himself completely to God, and God in turn revealed him and gave him to the whole world. He guided, consoled, healed and granted peace to the multitudes of people who sought him. His sanctified soul overflowed with divine love and his saintly face radiated the divine Grace. All day long, he tirelessly gathered the human pain and imparted divine consolation.

He is the founder of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki, Greece, which he also guided spiritually for twenty-eight years (1967-1994). It was to this Holy Monastery that he also entrusted and treasured the Holy Relics of his Godfather, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, to whose memory a temple of Byzantine design was later erected.

After suffering excruciating pains, which, as he used to say, benefited him more than the ascetic struggles of his entire life, he fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, in the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki. He was buried next to the Church of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

May we have his blessing, Amen.

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# ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

# PREFACE

When the Blessed Elder Paisios fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, he left behind a spiritual legacy: his teachings. Ever a simple monk, with only an elementary school education, but rich in the wisdom of God, the Elder emptied himself for the sake of others. His teaching was neither instruction, nor catechism. He lived the Gospel, and everything he taught flowed naturally from his way of life, whose main characteristic was love. He had formed himself according to the Gospel and, for this reason, it was his countenance that taught first and then his evangelical love and enlightened word. When he received people of all backgrounds, he did not simply listen patiently to the problems they confided in him, but with his holy simplicity and discernment, he would enter deeply into their heart and make their pain, anxiety and trouble his own. And, then, gradually, the miracle would take place: the transformation of the person. He used to say, "God performs a miracle when we wholeheartedly participate in the pain of our fellow human beings."

We saw with great joy the interest generated by the first books that circulated on the life and teachings of the Elder Paisios. Many spoke with admiration about the

answers they found to their questions, the solutions to their problems and the consolation to their grief. Our joy was even greater when people who had distanced themselves from the Mother Church became rightly concerned and changed their way of life. We often thought of the words of the hymnographer referring to Saint Basil the Great: *He lives, though he lies asleep in the Lord; he lives even among us, as one who speaks through his writings*. At the same time, we felt a compelling need to offer the very beneficial words of Elder Paisios – which we were recording with reverence from the very first steps of our Sisterhood, because they were so helpful to us – to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were so persistently asking for them.

The Good God provided that our *Hesychasterion*[1] owe its very existence to Elder Paisios. It was he who received the Episcopal approval of His Eminence, Synesios, the Metropolitan of Kassandreia, to establish our Monastery and who sought to find the appropriate location. And he did this because his noble and sensitive heart felt great gratitude to us for having taken care of him when we first met him, in 1966, during a hospital stay for a lung operation. From that time on, he felt that he was our big brother and had the obligation to "provide for his sisters," as he used to say, by establishing the Monastery. The first Sisters were settled at the Monastery in October of 1967. Elder Paisios spent two months in the *Hesychasterion* to help in the organization of the coenobitic life. After that, he would come out of Mount Athos, usually twice a year, to help the Sisterhood in their monastic way of life and he would assist each Sister individually in her spiritual struggle, with his God inspired advice and his personal experience. From the Holy Mountain, the "spiritual America", as he used to call it, he continued to help them through prayer and the letters he would send to each Sister individually or to the entire Sisterhood.

1. *Hesychasterion* (pl. *Hesychasteria)* in Greece and outside Mount Athos is a Coenobitic Monastery in which the local Bishop has the right to intervene in spiritual matters alone, but not in administrative matters.



In 1967, when Elder Paisios started establishing the foundations of coenobitic life in the *Hesychasterion*, from the simplest practical things to the most spiritual, he was forty-three years old. He had already attained the mature manhood *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13) and he had the wisdom of an Elder. From the first days of coenobitic life, we discovered that his words were *the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68) and that much of what he said should be taken as an axiom for our daily life. For this reason, we felt compelled to write down his words so that they would not to be forgotten and could serve as a secure rule for monastic life.

After we filled the first notebooks, we submitted them with considerable hesitation to his judgment. We hesitated because the Elder always emphasized the practical application; he did not want us just to gather material, "ammunitions", without putting his words into action. He always asked that we cultivate spiritually whatever we heard or read. Otherwise, he used to explain to us, there would be no benefit from all writings and notes just as there is no benefit to a state when it has a lot of armaments but lacks a trained army that will put them in use. Relenting to our persistent pleas, he agreed to see our notes and

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to complete or correct any points that we had not understood correctly.

The recording of his spiritual counsels continued all along the twenty-eight years that the Elder was overseeing and guiding the *Hesychasterion*. All meetings of the Elder with the entire Sisterhood or the Monastery Council and the Abbess were recorded – initially by notes taken down by the Sisters and later by tape recorder. Also recorded were conversations between the Elder and each Sister separately, who wrote down his words immediately after her conversation with him was over. When Elder Paisios realized what we were doing, he was rather irritated: "Why are you taking this down?" he asked. "Are you saving it for an emergency? You should put it into practice; apply it. Who knows what you are saying in these notes! Let me see." When we showed him a sample, the notes of one Sister, his expression changed; he was comforted and reassured, and with satisfaction exclaimed, "My goodness! She is like a tape recorder! She wrote it exactly as I said it!"

Our conversations with Elder Paisios were usually in the form of answers to our questions. In his private conversations with the Sisters, the questions mainly concerned their personal struggle. In meetings with the Monastery Council, which were scheduled in advance, subjects were raised that concerned us during his absence. These were put in the form of questions to be discussed when he came to visit. These questions covered all kinds of subjects: administrative, practical, spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, national and so forth. Finally, in meetings of the entire Sisterhood, besides the questions raised by the Sisters, the Elder discussed various other topics,



which simply came up on the spot, in the course of the conversation. The Elder would use every word and image he could for the spiritual benefit of the soul. The sound of an aeroplane flying over the Monastery, the noise of a machine, the chirping of a bird, the opening of a door or a simple phrase could set him talking for a long time about a serious matter. "I put everything to use," he used to say, "in order to reach Heaven. If we approach and work on all things spiritually, do you know how much spiritual profit can be made and what spiritual experience can be acquired?"

In his contacts with people, Father Paisios sought to prepare them for the Kingdom of Heaven by helping them to know the will of God and come closer to Him. Thus, he put to practice one of his favourite sayings that "the Good God looks after us first for our next life and then for this life." When he mentioned something about nature, science, art or everyday life, he was not interested in these subjects themselves, but used them as parables in order to awaken souls, and to help them grasp the deeper meaning of life and "cling" to God.

Because his manner of speech was simple, spontaneous and full of natural humour, he could tell the greatest truths in a plain and joyful manner. "I am making sunshine," he used to say; he meant that just like the sun is necessary for the flowers to bloom, a gentle pastoral approach enables the opening and healing of the soul. This was his enlightened pastoral care, which often prepared the soil of the soul to receive the austerity of his words about the unyielding and steadfast evangelical truth. In this way, even his most demanding word fell

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upon the human heart as a beneficial dew, cultivating it and bringing forth spiritual fruit.

After Elder Paisios fell asleep, the material that was collected during these twenty-eight years, together with the letters that he had sent to the *Hesychasterion* from the Holy Mountain, was classified according to subject so as to be used everyday in the life of the *Coenobium*. Events relating to his life were also recorded, including those of a divine nature, to which he referred not for bragging but for spiritual charity. "I am not telling you this," he used to say, "so that you can give me ribbons, and bravos. When I tell a war story from the time of my military service, or anything else, even a humorous example, I do so to make a point, so that you can grasp its deeper meaning. I don't like talking about useless things." In this manner he made himself a "spiritual blood donor". He wanted to fortify our anaemic faith, trigger our *philotimo*[2] and, being the noble man of God that he was, to cultivate the same nobility in us so that we can become by grace akin to God. "More and more I am emptying myself," he used to say, "and what is the result? In order to help you, I am forced to speak about myself; this is such a waste, a spiritual waste! Does it at least help you? I want you to know that every time I have to mention an incident from my life, how, for instance, the Providence of God has helped me on a certain occasion, something is being lost; I feel emptier. Does it at least bear fruit for you?"

2. *Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, is the reverent distillation of goodness, the love shown by humble people, from which every trace of self has been filtered out. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow men, and out of spiritual sensitivity and a sense of honour they try to repay the slightest good which others do for them.



Taking into account the difficult years that we are living through, we decided to publish all this material in a series of volumes starting with those topics that would be of general interest. Although many of these topics are part of everyday life, they must still be faced according to the Gospel; otherwise, the consequences for this life but also for our future, eternal life will be sorrowful or worse yet, devastating.

In making this decision, we were encouraged by an idea that Elder Paisios had entertained for years. He wanted to write "a book that would reach everybody, laity, monks and clergy." The idea had never materialized, since he gave all of his time to the many hurting souls who came every day to his *Kalyvi*. He gave himself completely to them, despite his limited and diminishing physical strength. "My news," he wrote in one of his letters "is many tired and suffering people. The people and their problems are ever increasing. Please pray that my physical strength not decrease. I need to provide a bit for myself, because I must be always ready to help, whether I can or not."

As already mentioned, the Elder usually responded to a variety of questions. For this reason, when faced with the task of integrating the various topics that he had addressed on different occasions, we decided to keep the dialogue form. Included in these dialogues, are excerpts from letters he had sent to the Monastery, extracts of books that he had written, as well as any additional material from his correspondence with other brothers and sisters in Christ, who entrusted us with their letters and with notes they had kept in their conversations with the Elder.

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The aim was to give each topic the fullest possible coverage. Every effort was also made to preserve, as much as possible, the immediacy and the grace of his spoken words. Some repetitive remarks that stressed the deeper meaning of his word and pierced many hearts were retained, as well as many exclamations, which were a natural part of his story telling, coming from a heart that was pulsating with great love for God and humankind.

References to monastic life are frequent, not only because Father Paisios was addressing nuns, but also because he wanted lay people to seek "the joy of Monasticism" that springs from total surrender to God. He believed that in this way they might be saved from the insecurity caused by a total dependence on the self. He wanted them to enjoy Heaven in this life.

*With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man* is the first volume of the series *Spiritual Counsels* of the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. In order to make its content more useful to the reader, it was divided into four thematic parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters and every chapter into sections with the appropriate subheadings. Footnotes that explain terms from the spiritual and monastic life will be more than familiar to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are well acquainted with patristic texts. They have been added in order to assist readers who lack this background.

As Elder Paisios made frequent use of examples from science, art and other fields, as noted above, we ran the risk of not rendering correctly some of his verbal terminology or expressions. For this reason, before publication, we



invited the review of certain sections and chapters from brothers and sisters in Christ who specialise in the relevant areas. We wish to thank them for examining this material with great reverence for the Elder and for making the appropriate corrections. We would, of course, be grateful for any additional suggestions.

We pray that "the spiritual waste" offered by the Elder out of an abundance of love, will bear fruit in the simple and good willing hearts of his readers, and that they will be enriched with the wisdom of God that is *hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes* (Lk 10:21).

Amen.

Sunday of All Saints, June 14, 1998

The Abbess of the Holy *Hesychasterion*
Mother Philothei
and the Sisters in Christ with me

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# CHAPTER SIX

## Sin Brings Calamities

Did you spray pesticide for the caterpillars?

– I did, Geronda.

– All these nuns and you cannot even get rid of one caterpillar! During the German occupation[1], when a plague of locusts had fallen, the Holy Belt of Panaghia from the Vatopedi Monastery was brought here to Chalkidiki for protection, and I remember how cloud after cloud of locusts were falling into the sea. In Epeirus, I remember, the locusts were falling like snow. We all worked together to gather them in tarpaulins and put them away. It was a time of hunger… I don't want to think about it. Wheat started growing again that year, but the crop was destroyed.

Locusts, wars, drought and disease, they are all scourges. They're not God's way of educating human beings but the result of our moving away from God. They happen because we stray from Him. God's wrath comes to make us remember Him and ask for help. It's not that

1. April 1941-May 1945.



He arranges and orders, so to speak, these calamities to happen. Rather, God allows them to happen because He sees how far human evil can go and how unwilling we are to change our ways, and so He tries to bring us to our senses. But they are not of His own making.

God had told Joshua[2] that the Israelites should not exterminate the tribe of the Philistines, because the Philistines would be a scourge to them every time they would forget God. So, when the Hebrews drew apart from God, the devil acquired rights, and he had his "cousins", the Philistines, to attack them. They would take the children of the Hebrews and smash them on rocks to kill them. Once, when the Israelites were attacked without being at fault, God took their side and fought for them. He sent hale the size of stones and destroyed them, because at that time the Israelites had a right to divine intervention.[3]

God had made so many promises about the Temple of Solomon to the Israelites, and yet look how many times it was burned and ravaged. When the people of Israel strayed from God, the Prophets would cry and cry for repentance, but the Israelites would hear nothing of it. They had put their minds to rest thinking that, "Since God blessed the Temple when Solomon built it and said that from now on our people will be blessed and holy, it's clear that everything, our walls and our Temple, will stay in place as He promised."[4] Well, God did make this promise, but only on the condition that the Israelites would live righteously. His Grace was in the Temple,

2. Cf. Josh 13:1-2; Jdg 3:1-4.
3. Cf. Josh 10:11.
4. Cf. I Kg 9:1-9 (LXX: III Kg 9:1-9).

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but when the Israelites broke the commandments, he allowed for it to be burned down and destroyed. When they repented, they were able to rebuild it again. For example, during the reign of King Zedekiah, when the people again strayed from God, Nebuchadnezzar came along and set the Temple on fire, destroyed the city walls and took many of the leading people prisoners, in chains to Babylon.[5] Of course, along with those who were at fault there were many who were innocent, so it was to their benefit. The guilty paid for their sins. Those who were not entirely to blame suffered, but they also reaped a small reward. Now, it's a crime when the suffering of the wrath of God by so many innocents is caused by the actions of only one person. And the reason is that the innocent would have inherited the Kingdom of Heaven without going through all this pain. Instead, they are now tormented.

It is good to know that the faithful who obey the commandments of God receive His Grace, and that God is, shall we say, obliged to help them in these difficult times. I have heard that a new disease[6] has appeared in the United States. Many people who live unnatural, sinful lives are infected by it and die. Now, I've been told that the disease has also spread here. You see, it's not God Who destroys people; it is people who destroy their families and themselves. It's easy to see that those destroyed are people whose lives have lost all meaning.

5. Cf. II Kg 24-25 (LXX: IV Kg 24-25).
6. This was said in November of 1984. The Elder is referring to AIDS.



– Geronda, why haven't we found a cure for cancer yet? Is it that God does not allow it or that we don't ask for His help?

– Well, the bad news is that even if a cure were to be found, a new illness would appear. When tuberculosis was around, they found the cure. Now, it's a new disease, cancer. And if God were to help cure cancer, another disease would follow. Human beings will once again be the cause, and that's the way it will continue, without an end in sight!

### *Whatever God Allows Is Out of Love For Man*

– Geronda, why does God allow a calamity to happen?

– There are all kinds of reasons. Sometimes God will allow something to happen so that something better may come out of it, and other times He wants to educate us. Some people are rewarded and others pay a debt; nothing is wasted. You know, whatever God allows, even when human beings perish, it is done out of love for man, because God has a "heart". Do you remember how the Prophet Elijah slaughtered the three hundred priests of Baal?[7] He told them, "Go ahead and pray and I will do the same, and the altar fire that starts up by itself will show us whose god is the true God." They started shouting, "Hear us our god Baal, hear us!" And the Prophet told them, "Your god is indisposed and can't hear you! Shout louder!" So they went on screaming and slashing their

7. Cf. I Kg 18:17-40 (LXX: III Kg 18:17-40).

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bodies with knives, as was their custom, and being in excruciating pain, they were screaming even louder to get Baal to listen to them. Since nothing happened, the Prophet Elijah finally told them, "Pour water three times over these logs." So they did it once, twice, three times. The wood had become very wet and water was pouring all around the altar. As soon as the Prophet Elijah prayed, fire fell from the sky and everything they had brought for sacrifice on the altar was burned and so was the altar itself! The Prophet then said, "Arrest these priests because they deceive the people and mislead them into idolatry." And they were all slaughtered.

Many may wonder, "But how could the Prophet have slaughtered so many people?" God is not a barbarian and neither was the Prophet. But these idolatrous priests had misguided so many people that the Prophet came to the point of saying, "I am all alone!" So much was their influence! And the truth is that they suffered more from slashing themselves than they did from the knife of the Prophet Elijah that put an end to their suffering. The pain they caused on themselves was greater because as you can see, what God allows is for the love of man, whereas their feats were so cruel and painful.

– Geronda, why was God's punishment so immediate in the Old Testament?

– At that time, that was the only language and the only law that people could understand. God was not any different then, but that law was designed for that particular people. Do not consider the law as being cruel and the Gospel as something different. The law was necessary to benefit the people of that time. Keep in mind that it was not the Law that was cruel and barbaric, it was the



people. Today, people might do worse things, but at least they understand how horrific they are. Nowadays, a mere oil-lamp starts swinging[8] and people are shaken up. But you see, in those days, God had to do so much! He had to send ten plagues to the Pharaoh, in order to take the Israelites out of Egypt. He turned the Red Sea into dry land so that they could walk to the other side. He provided a cloud by day to protect them from the sun and a pillar of light to guide them by night. And even after all these miracles, they took a golden calf for their god.[9] Today, people would never believe that a calf could lead them to the Promised Land.

### *Today God Is Put Aside*

The Good God gives us His blessings in abundance. We should not be ungrateful and rouse His anger, because *the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*[10] God forbid. In our days, people have not seen war and hunger, and they say that they have no need of God. They have everything and appreciate nothing. But if hard times come, such as a famine and so on, and they have nothing to eat, be sure that they will come to value even bread and marmalade and everything else they will be deprived of. If we don't praise God, He will allow us to be tried with some misfortune, so that we may come to appreciate the

8. The Elder means that an oil-lamp may move miraculously, such as the oil-lamp in the Katholikon of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos, which occasionally as a sign of impending events on the Holy Mountain or elsewhere in the world.

9. Cf. Ex 32:1-6.

10. Eph 5:6.

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goods things that we have. But if we are full of appreciation, God will not allow anything bad to happen to us.

In the old days when we did not have the great comforts we have today and science had not advanced as much, people were forced to take refuge in God to cope with their difficulties and God would help them. Nowadays, because science has made such great advances, people put God aside. They live without God. They figure, "We'll do this, we'll do that." They think of fire engines, of drilling equipment, of this and that. But what can they really do without God? They will only bring about His wrath. You see, for example, when there is no rain, instead of saying, "We'll pray," they say, "we'll drill for water." And the worst part is that it's not only the unbelievers who think this way, but with all the technology in our hands, even the faithful are forgetting God's power. We are fortunate that God has not given up on us. But little do we understand of His wonderful Providence and care for us.

Some folks were saying, "We don't need God, we have drilling equipment." In fact, we should be asking and pleading with God even more for a double miracle to take place, because we have damaged nature so much with all our doings. I was watching the clouds the other day; they were going back and forth, gathering here and then spreading over there, moving up and down. Then the wind blew and took them away altogether. And instead of people saying, "Now God must perform two miracles, to keep the clouds in place," what we actually hear is "We don't need God." We must be grateful that He does not take seriously every word we say; otherwise, we would be in such trouble.



They drill one hundred and fifty meters into the ground to find water and they find nothing. In Nauplion, they went one hundred and eighty meters deep and found only salt water. Others want to divert the Elenos River and bring it to Athens. They have been trying to do this for ten years and nothing has come out of it; can you imagine the expenses involved? And even if they had succeeded, the city would still run out of water. But most people would never come out and say, "I have sinned."

During the recent drought, a politician went to a small village and promised to provide water by purifying and reusing the waste water.[11] And they were so impressed! This makes no sense! See what people are coming up with! We are going to start drinking, forgive my saying, our urine! To consider this in a city, where people have been overwhelmed by the secular spirit and things are out of control, makes some sense. But to consider this to be a solution in a tiny village and to think of it as being progress is really incredible! Here people should turn to God and ask for His mercy, to send them some rain, instead of trying to solve their problem by purifying their urine! It's a horrible thing!

Up on the Holy Mountain of Athos, some monks tried to plant pine-trees, in order to use them later to make paper. Well, they all dried out; that was God's answer. Now tell me, is this what the Holy Mountain should be producing, napkins and toilet paper? Do you see what's happening? Nothing came out of their labours to plant these trees, except the wrath of God!

11. This was said in November of 1990.

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– Geronda, did they realize that what they were doing was wrong?

– Of course, they did not. They even brought machines from Germany to drill for water. And instead of finding water, they lost even the water they already had. Do you see what happens when spiritual sensitivity disappears and is replaced by the business instinct? This is why Monasticism is gradually losing so much of its piety. They do not seem to understand that without the rain even the existing water will disappear. They use only logic and put God aside.

We read in the Old Testament that during a Syrian siege, Samaria had run out of water.[12] It was a horrible long-term siege! Animals were dying left and right and mothers had reached the point where they were eating their children. The Prophet Elisha went to the steward of King Jehoram and told him, *The animals may be dead, and people dying of hunger, but God's help is on the way.* The steward, who sought to solve everything through his logic, replied, "Where will the help come from, the sky?" Then the Prophet said, "God will send help tomorrow, but you will not be there to rejoice in it." And that's what happened. The next day God sent such a panic to the enemy camp causing them to hear galloping horses, the noise of chariots, their ears to buzz … that they thought that the Egyptian reinforcements had arrived. So they went on the run and left behind their tents, food and weapons, and all their possessions. And when they went back to their homeland, temptation brought them such confusion that they ended up killing each other, one hundred and eighty

12. Cf. II Kg 7 (LXX: IV Kg 7).



thousand people gone! Meanwhile, four Israelite lepers that were living outside the city said, "Why don't we go to the enemy camp to see if there's something to eat? We are dying anyway." They approached one tent and found it empty; they looked into another, and it was empty as well. The enemy was nowhere to be found! So they took food, and whatever else they could find … sacks full of things. They let the others know that the enemy had retreated, but the Israelites thought it was all a plot. "The enemy is hiding," they thought, "to make us open the gates and let them in." An officer then told them, "We are left with five animals, why not send a few soldiers to see what's going on?" Each soldier went into a different direction, and when they returned they reported, "The enemy has left panic-stricken, leaving everything behind." Then, all the Israelites came out of the fortress to get food and so on. On their way out, the starving crowds ran over the steward who was standing there, trying to maintain the order. And that's exactly what the Prophet Elisha had said, that the steward would witness God's help but not enjoy it himself. You see how God put everything in order?

### *May God Have Mercy on The World and Send Us Some Rain*

God has set everything in order! The snows melt and the springs fill with water. Now there is no snow and no rain.[13] What is going to happen? What will people drink? May God have mercy on the people; may He have compassion for us and send us some rain, because

13. It was said during the great drought in November of 1990.

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if this draught continues, the leaves of the trees will dry out and there will not be any green olives or even green leaves. No matter what man may sow, unless God pours His blessing from above, His rain, nothing will come out. Rain is *aghiasmos*, blessed water.

You see, people have gotten used to living with plenty of water, and they will have such a hard time, poor souls, with water shortages. It is not only because of our sins that God will not send rain, but also because it will not suffice for everybody if we use so much of it. I am thinking what will happen in the cities! They need a bucket of water just to flush a toilet. Without water, germs will be everywhere and then cholera will follow. People will die and their unburied bodies will need to be sprayed with disinfectant. Fortunately, the Good God is still providing for the world.

We live in the times of the Apocalypse. The drought we have been having for so many years, the lack of rain, what do you think they are all about? Was there such a drought before? Even here, in Chalkidiki, an entire river dried out, the fish died and there was a stench everywhere. In Thessaloniki too, they have problems. The water level at Marathon Lake is so low that one can see little isles here and there. The level of Peneios River is also down. The Evros River had some water, but the Bulgarians dammed it to the north and now it has dried out. If there is trouble with Turkey, tanks can now easily go through. The same thing is going on in Cyprus; if it does not rain this year, they will have a major problem with water. And that's not all. There's so much more! As for the trees, some are burned by forest fires, while others dry out and die altogether. People also get sick and die. When people



do not repent, how can God send us rain? If we put our trust in God, do you know what can happen? It is not a small thing to have God on our side. For God there are no difficult problems and no difficult solutions. To God everything is simple. He does not use greater power for the supernatural things and less power for the natural things. He uses the same power for everything. The most important thing for man is to cling to God.

Do you pray for rain or aren't you concerned? This is the time for ploughing the fields and sowing the crops. The fields should have been sown by now, but people cannot even plough them yet. This drought is a trial from God. The monk's work at such circumstances is to pray. And I have a complaint against you. Last time when people were harvesting the wheat to make hay, because it had not rained, you did not even bother to say a prayer for them. And we all know why: it was because you had water for yourselves and were watering with a hose. This should not be repeated. Next time you should experience the other people's pain and learn to pray for them. You should write to me and let me know. You will take exams. If you pass, that is, if it rains, I will make you my partners in prayer and we'll share whatever we receive from divine Providence…

When I pray for rain and I see even one cloud in the sky (even if it does not send some rain), I praise God for sending even that one little cloud. But my conscience bothers me because there are so many spiritual "clouds" inside me that displace God's clouds. If we humbly ask God for His mercy, He will help. In a time of drought, a humble man's prayer will gather clouds. And we should always pray that the rain God sends may also have a

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spiritual energy, to quench the spiritual fire which the evil devil has set in the world to burn souls.

I was pleased when I heard some people say, "We aren't worthy, but God has taken pity on us, and He sent us some rain and some snow." If we have such humble thoughts, God will send even more. To recognize our sin is the beginning of repentance. Thank God that a bit of yeast still exists. Pray that God take His "screwdriver" and tighten up the screws in people's minds. I see good intentions in some people in high places. At least they understand where we are heading.

### *May God Grand Repentance*

Oh, if we could only understand the great forbearance of God! It took one hundred years to make Noah's ark.[14] Do you think that God could not have made an ark any faster? He let Noah suffer for one hundred years so that others may understand and repent. Noah would tell them, "Repent, a deluge is coming!" But they would only mock him. "He is making cages," they were saying and went about their usual business. And now, in two minutes, God can shake up the world and change all the people into believers, super believers. How? All He has to do is to turn the earthquake button from five, six or to seven on the Richter scale. At eight on the Richter scale, the high rise apartment buildings will be falling upon each other like drunkards on the street. At ten, everyone will start screaming, "We have sinned; please save us." They may even say, "We will all become monks!" But as soon as

14. Cf. Gen 6.



the earthquake is over, while still shaking but standing, they will again run to the *bouzouki*[15] clubs. Their return to God would not be from true repentance, but they would just say it temporarily to be saved from the disaster.

– Geronda, when an act of God occurs and it is a manifestation of His wrath, will the prayers of just people be heard?

– Do you know what actually happens? The prayers of the righteous cannot be heard because people have not really repented. It is a different matter when we anger God through sin and actually recognize our fault; then He takes pity on us and comes to our assistance. But when we don't recognize that we have angered God and go on in our usual ways, then how can God hear the prayers of the just? Have we made a mistake? Then, we must realize that we have done so, if God is to forgive us. In the case of spiritual people, mistakes are not excusable. One of the prayers says, "For our sins and for the people's acts of ignorance."[16] You see for lay people mistakes are "acts of ignorance," but for those who live spiritual lives they are "sins". That is why when a spiritual person makes a mistake, it is a serious offence. Lay people have excuses. This year's fire on the Holy Mountain during the Feast of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* on August 15, was something horrible.[17] Every possible expert was on site, but they could do nothing save stand there and watch the fire spread. Even the aeroplanes dropping water seemed to be making things worse. In one Monastery, they even

15. *Bouzouki* (pl. *bouzoukia*) is a Greek long-necked stringed musical instrument related to the mandolin.

16. Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, The Prayer of Proskomide.

17. This was said in November of 1990.

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created fire safety zones to protect it from the fire, but the fire suddenly jumped over to the *archontariki.*[18] The Holy Mountain was burning for fifteen days. On the fifteenth day, the fire burnt out by itself. Some people were saying, "Why doesn't the *Panaghia* put it out?" We come to the point of blaspheming the name of God. After six days, another fire started somewhere else but rain came and put it out directly. Don't they understand: how is it that this fire burnt out, but the other fire did not?

There are those who pray with pain in their heart, but, not knowing the spiritual laws, are not heard, because the wrath of God is already in effect. Others again don't pray at all, they do not even do one *komboschoini,*[19] because they agree with God's righteous wrath whose purpose is to make people come to their senses. May God enlighten us monks more, because most of us are foolish virgins and our lamps are filled with water and there isn't enough oil for the wick. People who live in the world are expecting us to lighten the way, to keep them from stumbling!

Let us pray that God will grant us repentance, so that we may escape His righteous wrath. This wrath will come and the only way to confront it will be to repent and obey His commandments.

18. Building where guests and pilgrims are given hospitality.

19. *Komboschoini* (*pl. komboschoinia*) is the black woollen prayer rope used by Orthodox people to count the number of repetitions of the Jesus Prayer.

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# PART ONE
# SIN AND THE DEVIL

*"We taste bitter poison when we live apart from sweet Jesus."*

# ΠΡΩΤΟ ΜΕΡΟΣ
# Η ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑ ΚΑΙ Ο ΔΙΑΒΟΛΟΣ

*«Φαρμάκι γενόμαστε, ὅταν ζοῦμε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν γλυκὺ Ἰησοῦ».*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### It Is Fashionable to Sin

### Ἡ ἁμαρτία ἔγινε μόδα

Geronda, did you tell anyone that there's going to be a war? That's what we heard. Is it true?

– I have not said anything of the sort, but people come up with things. Even if I knew something, to whom would I say it?

– Geronda, war is such a barbarous thing.

– If people did not have the "courtesy" of sin they would not have reached this barbarous state. Even more barbarous is this moral degradation. People's bodies and souls are falling apart. Someone told me, "They call Athens a 'jungle' but no one is leaving the city. Everyone calls it a 'jungle' and yet everyone still gathers there." Human beings have come down to the level of animals. You know what animals do when they enter the stable; they defecate and urinate… Then, as the manure ferments, they feel warm and don't feel like getting themselves out of there. The same happens with human beings; they feel the comfort of sin and don't have the heart to leave. They smell the stench, but they stay anyway. You see, if someone were to come inside the stable he would not be

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able to stand the stench; but those who have got used to it are not bothered.

– Geronda, some people say that it's not only today that people are sinning; this has been going on ever since ancient Rome.

– Yes, but the Romans were idolaters. And when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, he was writing to baptized idolaters who had gone back to their bad habits.[1] We should not take as example a decadent era. Today, they have taken sin and made it fashionable. Have a look at us, an Orthodox nation and yet, we are in such a state! Imagine how other nations must be! And the worst thing is that today, that the sin has become so fashionable, if people see someone who does not go with the flow, avoids sin and is pious, they consider him old-fashioned and backward. For them not to sin is considered an insult and to sin is considered progress. And this is the worst thing of all that could happen. If today, all those who live in sin would only acknowledge their condition, God would have mercy on them. Instead, they justify the unjustifiable and they glorify sin. This is the greatest blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: they take sin to be progress and morality the status quo. For this reason, the wages of those who struggle in the world and maintain a pure life are great and of great worth.

In the old days, if one were a pervert or a drunk, they would be ashamed to appear in public because people would scorn them. A woman who had strayed even a little did not dare to come out of her house; and in a way, this was a sort of restraint. These days, if someone is upright,

1. Cf. Rom 1:24-32.

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say a young woman who lives a life of piety, people will say, "Look at how she lives." Back then, when lay people sinned, poor souls, they felt their sinfulness, bowed their head a bit and would not mock one who lived a spiritual life. On the contrary, they actually admired them. Today, people have no sense of their guilt and there is no respect. All standards have been levelled. And people make fun of those that don't live a worldly life.

### *The Checks of Conscience*

Although France is an advanced nation – it's not underdeveloped – recently, eighty thousand people converted to Islam.[2] Why? Because they have turned sin into a fashion. You see, they are bothered by their conscience, they know that something is wrong and they want to set their conscience at ease. And just like the ancient Greeks made up the twelve gods in order to justify their passions, these people seek a religion that would put their souls to rest. Islam is, in a way, the best suitable solution. It allows them to take as many women as they want for wives, it promises in the next life "mountains of rice, lakes of yogurt and rivers of honey"! And no matter what their sins are, once their dead body is washed with hot water, they are cleansed! They go to Allah clean! What else could they ask for? It's all so convenient. But these French converts will not find rest. Although they are trying, they will not find rest because the passions can never be justified.

No matter what people do, even if they are insensitive, heartless and soulless, they will not find peace and rest.

2. This was said in November of 1988.



They try to justify the unjustifiable, but inside they are tormented and agitated; that is why they are constantly craving entertainment, listening to loud music, getting drunk, and watching television. They want distraction in order to forget because their conscience bothers them. They can't even rest when they sleep. You see, there is the conscience. The first "Holy Scripture" that God gave to Adam and Eve was conscience, and we inherit it from our parents like a photocopy. Not matter how hard we may try to run over our conscience, it is still there checking on us. That is why people say, "This thing is eating him up." Indeed, there is nothing sweeter than having a clear conscience. One feels like he has wings; he soars.

### *Separation From God Is Hell*

I cannot remember even a day without divine consolation. Sometimes, of course, interruptions occur and I feel bad. Then, I can understand how horrible are the lives of most people, who live without this consolation because they have distanced themselves from God. The more one distances himself from God, the worse things become. One may have nothing else, but having God is all that he needs. That's it! Even if one has everything but lacks God, in his heart he will be tortured. That's why it is important to get as close to God as possible. It is only next to Him that we can find true and eternal joy. We taste bitter poison when we live apart from sweet Jesus. When a sinful man becomes a man of God again, a prince, he is fed with divine pleasure, with heavenly sweetness and feels the delight of Paradise; though he lives on earth, he gets to taste the joy of Heaven. Every day that goes by,

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his joy grows bigger and he gets to wonder if there is in Heaven something higher than what he experiences here on earth. Such is his situation, that he cannot do any work; his knees bend over like candlesticks from that divine warmth and sweetness while his heart leaps and tries to shatter its thin cage to run away, because earth and all earthly things appear to be worthless.

In the beginning, man had communion with God. Later, however, when he moved away from the Grace of God, he was like someone who used to live in a palace and then was banned from it and now views it from a distance and weeps. Just as a child suffers away from its mother, man also suffers when he is distanced from God. We are tormented. Separation from God is hell. The devil has managed to distance people from God so much that they have reached the point of worshipping statues and sacrificing even their children to them. It's a horrible thing! Where do the demons find all these deities? The god Chemosh! Just hearing his name is enough.[3] But the devil is the most tortured being of all because he is the farthest removed from God, from Love. When love departs, hell sets in. What is the opposite of love? Evil and malice; evil equals suffering.

One who has distanced himself from God becomes prone to demonic influence, while the other one who is close to God receives divine Grace. He who already has God's Grace will be given more. And he who has only a little and scorns it, he will lose it all.[4] The Grace of God

3. Chemosh was a god of the Moabites, descendents of Moab, the oldest son of Lot (Cf. I Kg 11:7). In Greek, the word sounds like the noun *chamos* (χαμὸς) that means loss, doom, desolation or things going out of control.

4. Cf. Lk 19:26.



is missing from most people today because by sinning they throw away whatever small portion of it they may have. And when divine Grace is gone, the demons rush at human beings and take possession of them.

Depending on their distance from God, people are in constant pain in this life and will be in eternal pain in the other life. For the taste and joy of Paradise begin, to an extent, in this life, depending on how much one lives according to the will of God. Either we shall experience a portion of the heavenly joy here on earth and will then go to Heaven, or we shall experience a portion of hell here and, God forbid, we shall end up in hell. Paradise is goodness. Hell is malice and evildoing. When we do something good, we feel joy. When we do something wrong, something evil, we suffer. The more good one does, the more joy he feels. The more one causes harm, the more his soul suffers. Can a thief feel any joy? He cannot. But the one who does good, he feels joy. Even if one finds something on the street and keeps it for himself, he will not find rest. Although he doesn't know to whom it belongs, nor has he harmed anyone or stolen it, he cannot find peace. Imagine if he had actually stolen it! Even when we receive something, a gift, we still do not feel the same joy that we do when we give. How then could someone who steals or takes away unjustly, feel joy? That is why one can look at people who live unjust lives and see on their faces so many grimaces!

### *The Boss You Work For Will Pay Your Wages*

People who live away from God are always without consolation and are doubly tormented. If one does not

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believe in God and in the future life, he is not only deprived of divine consolation but also brings eternal condemnation upon his soul. The boss you work for will pay your wages. If you work for the devil, he will pay you by making your life miserable here on earth. If you work for virtue, Christ will pay you. And the more you work for Christ, the more you will shine and find bliss. But we say, "Am I a fool to work for Christ?" Isn't this horrible that we do not recognize Christ's sacrifice for humanity? Christ was crucified to save us from sin, to cleanse mankind. Look at what Christ has done for us. What have we done for Him?

People want to sin, but they also want God to be good to them. He should keep forgiving us while we continue to sin. We want to do whatever we like and we want Him to forgive us. He is supposed to forgive us no matter what we do. People don't have faith in God and they rush to commit sin. All that is evil begins from lack of faith. People don't believe in eternal life and for this reason nothing stops them; they treat others unjustly, they abandon their children… The things that take place …, so many grave sins. Not even the Holy Fathers had foreseen such sins in the Sacred Canons. It's like Sodom and Gomorrah when God had said, "I don't believe that such sins exist; I should go and see for myself."[5]

If people don't repent and return to God, they will lose eternal life. Man must be helped in order to feel the deeper meaning of life, to come to his senses and to experience divine consolation. The goal is to rise spiritually, not simply to avoid sin.

5. Cf. Gen 18:21.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## These Days the Devil Is Roaming Free

### *When We Sin We Give Rights to Temptation*

There is so much demonic influence in the world today. The devil is roaming free because people have given him the right to do so and they are vulnerable to horrific attacks by him. Once someone rightly said: "In the old days the devil was preoccupied with human beings; not anymore. He shows people the way, tells them 'farewell', and off they go." It's terrible! You see, when the demons wanted to enter the swine in the country of the Gadarenes, they asked for Christ's permission – since the swine had not given the devil an excuse, he did not have the right to possess them.[1] Christ allowed this to happen so that the Israelites, who were forbidden from eating pork, may be punished.

– Geronda, some people say that the devil does not exist.

– I know; someone told me that I should take out of the French translation of *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian* all references to demonic possession, because Europeans will

1. Cf. Lk 8:26-33.

not understand it; they don't believe in the existence of the devil. You see, they explain everything with psychology. But if they took to psychiatrists the possessed of the Gospel there would be no end to electroshocks. Christ has removed from the devil the right to do harm. The devil can harm us only if we allow him to have power over us. Those who do not participate in the Mysteries of the Church give rights to temptation and become vulnerable to demonic influence.

– Geronda, in what other ways can one give rights to the devil?

– Rationalism, contradiction, stubbornness, willfulness, disobedience, and insolence all are qualities of the devil. People are vulnerable to the degree that they have these qualities. But when the soul is purified, the Holy Spirit enters a man and fills him with Grace. On the contrary, when it is infected with mortal sin, the unclean spirit dwells in him. When, again, the soul is not mortally infected, then, it is merely under the influence of the evil spirit.

It is unfortunate that nowadays people don't want to curb their passions and their will; they do not accept anyone's advice. From this point on, they speak with insolence and reject the Grace of God. As a result, anything they undertake does not prosper because it is subject to satanic influences. Man is beside himself because the devil directs him from the outside. The devil is not inside the man, God forbid, but even from the outside, he can take over and run a person's life.

When divine Grace "departs" from a man, he becomes worse than the devil. For, there are things that the cunning devil himself will not do; instead, he will urge men to do them for him. He does not, for instance, commit crimes;



he has man do them for him. That is how people end up being possessed.

### *Confession Deprives the Devil of His Rights*

If people only went to a Spiritual Father to confess their sins, the demonic influence would cease, and they would be able to think more clearly. Nowadays, they cannot even think because of demonic influence. Repentance and confession deprive the devil of his rights over us.

Recently,[2] a sorcerer came to the Holy Mountain and blocked the road with sticks and nets, near my *Kalyvi*. Anyone passing through there, who had not been to confession, would have been harmed and would have no idea why. As soon as I saw them, I crossed myself, went through and broke the spell. Later on, the sorcerer came to my *Kalyvi* and told me about his evil schemes and burned his books. The devil has neither power nor dominion over those who have faith, go to Church regularly and receive Holy Communion. He just barks a little "arf, arf!" like a dog without teeth. But he has great power over one who has no faith and gives him the excuse to take over. He can lynch him and tear him to pieces with his teeth. The devil's authority upon a soul depends on the rights this soul has granted him.

Even when a soul dies in good order, as it rises to Heaven, the devil follows behind. It's like a train moving with tremendous speed, while dogs are running after it and in front of it, barking and occasionally some of them

2. This was said in June of 1985. At that time Father Paisios was residing in the *Panagouda Kalyvi*.

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getting run over. But if one is not in good spiritual order, the train cannot go with speed, because its wheels are damaged, dogs will enter through its open doors and bite some passengers.

When the devil has been allowed to acquire great rights over a man and has him in his grip, the cause that will bring his power to an end must be found. Otherwise, no matter how intensely the others pray for someone, the devil will not leave him. The devil will cripple a man. Priests may do exorcisms over and over again, but the possessed man ends up paying the price since the devil will then torture him even more because of the exorcisms. Unless we repent and go to confession, and destroy the rights that the devil has over us, he will not go away and we will always be troubled. As long as the devil has these rights, he will not go away even if one reads and rereads exorcisms for days, weeks, months or years.

### *The Devil Will Not Approach a Pure Creature of God*

– Geronda, why am I am overwhelmed by passions?

– If one gives in to temptations, he is seized by the passions. What God wants from you – which is for your benefit too – is to take your passions and throw them at the devil's face. Turn your anger, your stubbornness and so on against him. Or, what is even better, "sell" your passions to the devil and use the money to buy "stones" to throw at him and keep him at a distance. Most often, we human beings allow the enemy to harm us by giving him all kinds of excuses either through carelessness or through proud thoughts. The devil can even take advantage of the



simplest thought or word. I remember, once, there was a family who had great love for each other. One day the husband started saying to his wife, "I will divorce you," and the wife was telling him the same thing, "I will divorce you." They were only kidding, of course. But the tempter, the devil, took advantage of it, and set up some minor difficulty which brought them on the verge of a real split. They did not even think of their children or of anything else. Fortunately, a Spiritual Father talked to them. "Are you going to divorce for something so trivial?" he asked them. After that, they came to their senses.

If one strays from the commandments of God, his passions will turn against him. And if one lets the passions wage war against him, the devil does not even need to bother with him again. The demons too are very skilful. They strike fast, looking for some passion, some weakness to start fighting against him. We must be careful to keep the doors and windows, our senses, shut and leave no crack open for temptation that will let the enemy in. These are the weak points. If you leave even a tiny crack open, the devil can get in and cause damage. The devil enters a man when there is mud in his heart; he does not approach a pure creature of God. When the heart is cleansed, then the enemy goes away and Christ returns. Just like a pig which grunts unhappily and goes away when it does not find mud, the devil will not come close to a heart that is not mired in filth. What sort of business could the devil have in a pure and humble heart? If, therefore, we realize that our house, which is our heart, is in ruins and the enemy has moved in, we have to tear it down immediately, in order to get rid of our bad tenant, the devil. For, when sin has gotten hold of a man for a long time, the devil

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will naturally have greater authority over him. The devil acquires more and more rights.

– Geronda, suppose a person who has lived carelessly by giving the devil authority over him decides to start a new life, by putting things in order and living carefully, will that person be fought by the devil?

– When these people turn around, God gives them strength, illumination and divine consolation to get them started. But as soon as the struggle begins, the enemy will fight them fiercely. At that point patience and perseverance is needed. Otherwise, how can the passions be uprooted? How can the old man shed his garment? How can pride go away? This is how we realize that we can do nothing on our own, and we humbly ask for God's mercy; it is then that humility comes. The same happens with someone who wants to give up a bad habit, for instance smoking or drugs. At first, he feels happy with his decision and throws them away. Then, he sees other people smoking, drinking or whatever and a fierce battle begins. If he overcomes the temptation, he turns his back to the habit without difficulty. All of us need to resist a little. The devil does his job; shouldn't we do ours?

### *We Should Not Start a Conversation With the Devil*

All of us have some inherited weaknesses but these cause us no harm. For instance, one may be born with a little mole on the face. A mole might make someone look beautiful, but if it is scratched it might also cause cancer. We should not let the devil scratch our passions. If we let him do that, "cancer" may occur.



We should have the spiritual courage to scorn the devil and all his cunning telegrams – our thoughts – and never start a conversation with him. Even if all the lawyers in the world were gathered together, they would not be able to compete with the tiniest of devils. If we want to end all relations with the tempter and avoid being tempted, we must cut off all conversation with him. Did something bad happen to us? Have we been unjustly treated? Have we been insulted? We should first check and see if we were wrong. If not, we have our reward. There's no need to carry on. If we carry on with the devil, he will weave his "lace" around us and will cause us great confusion. We will be forced to scrutinize everything with a satanic legalism, and will end up wild and agitated.

I remember when the Italian army withdrew, they left behind piles and piles of hand grenades inside their tents; powder magazines were piled even higher. People would come to get the tents. Children would play with the hand grenades and so many of them, poor souls, were killed. Playing with hand grenades! And we want to play games with the devil!

### *The Devil Is Weak*

– Geronda, my thoughts tell me that now more than ever the devil has great power.

– The devil has malice and hatred but he does not have power. It is God's love that is all-powerful. The devil tries to appear powerful but he can't make it. He appears strong but in reality he is powerless. Many of his destructive schemes fail even before they start. Would a good father ever allow a few young hoodlums to bully his children?

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– Geronda, the demons scare me.

– What are you afraid of? The devil has no power. Christ is All-powerful. The tempter is rotten. Don't you wear a cross? The devil's weapons are weak. Christ has armed us with His Cross. Only when we abandon our spiritual armour is the enemy strong. An Orthodox priest had only to show a small cross to a sorcerer and the demon he had invoked started trembling.

– Why is the devil so afraid of the Cross?

– Because when Christ received the spitting, the blows and the beatings, the kingdom and the power of the devil were crushed. How wonderful is the way in which Christ defeated the devil! "The devil's dominion was crushed with a reed," used to say a Saint. When Christ was given the last blow with a reed, at that very moment, the devil's power was destroyed. In other words, patience is our spiritual defence and humility our greatest weapon against the devil. The greatest balm that Christ's sacrifice on the Cross gave us is the crushing of the devil. After the Crucifixion of Christ, the devil is like a snake with no fangs, with no poison; he is like a wild dog without teeth. All poison was removed from the devil; all teeth were removed from the wild dogs that are the demons. So, they are now disarmed, while we are armed with the Cross. There is nothing, really nothing that the demons can do to a creature of God when we ourselves don't hand over rights to them. They only make noise; they have no authority over people.

Once, when I was at the *Kelli* (Cell) of the Holy Cross, I kept a wonderful vigil! A whole bunch of demons had gathered at night on the roof of the *Kelli*. At first, they banged the walls with a sledgehammer and then made



all kinds of noise as if they were rolling big logs and tree stumps. I started making the sign of the cross at the ceiling and chanting, *Thy Cross we venerate, O Lord, and we glorify Thy holy Resurrection.*[3] I stopped; they started again. "Now," I said to myself, "we'll have two choirs, you from up there with the logs, and me down here." When I started, they stopped. At one point I was chanting, *Thy Cross we venerate, O Lord, and we glorify Thy holy Resurrection*, and the other, *Lord, you have given us Your Cross as a weapon against the devil.*[4] I spent the most delightful night in psalmody and when I would stop for a while, they would start the entertainment! Every time they put on a different performance!

– Didn't they leave the first time you chanted?

– No. As soon as I stopped, they started. Both choirs had to have their vigil! It was such a beautiful night! I chanted with such a longing! I had a great time!

– Geronda, what does the devil look like?

– Do you know how "beautiful" he is? He's something else! You have only to see him to believe it! But God's love does not allow that man can see the devil! For sure, most people would die of fear! Imagine if they could see how he operates; if they could see his "sweet" form! Some among them, however, might really be entertained! I mean, entertained like the movies. But to get to see this kind of show, one must do a lot of work in advance and even then he might not make it!

– Does he have horns and a tail?

– Yes, he is fully equipped.

3. It is a *Troparion* for the Feast of the Adoration of the Precious Cross.
4. Resurrectional *Stichero* from the Praises of the 8th Tone.

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– Geronda, did the demons become so ugly when they fell and from angels they became demons?

– Of course! And it's like they have been struck by lightning. When lightning strikes a tree, doesn't it turn into a charred stump? The demons look like that. For a while, I used to say to the devil, "Come by so that I can see what you look like and avoid falling into your hands. Just a look is enough to see how evil you are. Should you get me, there's no telling how much I will suffer."

### *The Devil Is Dumb*

– Geronda, does the devil know what we have in our heart?

– Know the human heart? That's the last thing he is fit to do! Only God has knowledge of our heart and it is only to those who belong to Him that He occasionally reveals – and that for our own good – what is in our heart. The devil knows only the mischief and the evil that he plants in those who serve him; he does not know our good thoughts. Sometimes, he figures it out from experience but even then, he usually misses the point. And if God does not permit him to do that, then he is constantly off target because he is in the dark; visibility, zero! For instance, he has no way of knowing a good thought that crosses my mind. But if I have a bad thought, he is aware of it, because he planted it there himself. If, say, I want to do something good, to save someone, the devil does not know this. But when he puts a thought in the mind of someone and tells him, "Go and save that person," he will also plant pride in his heart and that's why he knows this thought. The moment we accept pride, we



provoke temptation. These things are very subtle! Do you remember the incident with Abba Macarios[5]?

Once Abba Macarios ran into the devil who was coming back from a nearby desert where he had gone to tempt the monks. The devil said to him, "All the Brothers are very angry with me, except one, who is my friend and obeys me, and when he sees me, he spins like a wheel." "And who is this Brother?" the Abba asked. "Theopemptos (Godsend) is his name," the devil answered. Abba Macarios went to the desert and found the Monk. He found a way to make him reveal his thoughts to him and. in this way the Monk was helped. When Abba Macarios met the devil again, he asked him about his Brother monks and he said, "Everyone is very angry with me; and the worst, even my friend has now changed, I cannot figure out how, and he is the angriest of all."[6] The devil did not know that Abba Macarios had gone to the Brother and helped him, because the Saint acted with humility, out of love, and the devil therefore had no power over that particular thought. If Abba Macarios had taken pride in what he did, he would have dispelled the Grace of God, and the devil would then have acquired rights over him. Were that the case, the devil would have known, because it would have been him who caused the Abba's pride.

– If we tell someone a good thought that is on our mind, can the devil hear it and tempt us afterwards?

– How could he hear it since the thought has no "devil" in it? But if he says what is on his mind in order to brag,

5. Saint Macarios the Great (the Egyptian), 300-390 A.D.

6. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Macarios the Great, p. 106:3, translated by Benedicta Ward, Mowbrays, London & Oxford, 1977.

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then the tempter will get in the way. In other words, if there is a predisposition for pride and one brags, "I will save this man," the devil will interfere and will know that thought. But if one acts with humility, out of love, the devil will know nothing. We need to be careful. These are very fine and subtle things. That is why the Fathers say that the spiritual life is the "science of all sciences".

– How come, then, Geronda, a fortune teller can tell three women that the one will get married, the other will suffer a misfortune, and the third will remain unmarried, and things actually turn out that way?

– The devil is experienced. Just like an engineer can determine when a house will collapse by merely looking at it, so too, the devil can look at how we live our lives and has the experience to tell where we are going to end up.

The devil is not clever; he is actually very dumb. He is all tangled up; he cannot be unraveled. He does some smart things and some dumb things. His deceptive machinations are crude. God has mercifully seen to that, so that we can recognize him. One must be too blinded by pride not to realize who he is. When we are humble, we can recognize the devil's traps, because humility enlightens us and brings us into kinship with God. It is humility that disables the devil.

### *The Reason That God Allows the Devil to Tempt Us*

– Geronda, why does God allow the devil to tempt people?

– So that He can select His children. "Do whatever you want," God tells the devil, because no matter what he



does, in the end, the devil will be smashed on the cornerstone that is Christ. If we believe that Christ is the cornerstone, then nothing will scare us.

God does not give the devil the permission to test us, unless something good is to come out of it. When He sees that a greater good will come out of it, He lets the devil do his job. Do you remember what Herod[7] did? He killed fourteen thousand infants, but, in so doing, he made fourteen thousand martyr angels. Can you believe it, fourteen thousand martyrs and angels! The devil had his face crushed. Diocletian[8] became the devil's partner when he brutally persecuted Christians, but, against his will, he did great good to the Church of Christ because he enriched it with Saints. He thought that he would eliminate all Christians, but in the end, he fell short of his expectations. He left countless holy Relics for us to venerate and made the Church of Christ stronger.

God could easily have wiped the devil off. He is God, after all. If He wishes, He can wrap him up and send him to hell, but He lets him be for our benefit. He would never allow him to torment and torture His creature without any reason. He let the devil loose up to a point, and for a specific time, so that the devil can help us with his malice by tempting us and sending us running to God for help. He will only allow the devil to tempt us if that is going to do us good. If nothing good will come out of it, He will not allow it. God permits everything for our own

7. King of Judea (40 B.C.-4 A.D.) who ordered the death of all children under the age of two in Bethlehem in order to kill the infant Jesus.

8. Emperor of Rome (284-305 A.D.) who instigated the last major persecution of the Christians in 303 A.D.

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good; we should believe this. He lets the devil be so that man may keep up the fight. No pain, no gain. If the devil did not torment us, we would have taken ourselves for saints. Thus, God allows the devil to attack us with malice, because these beatings clear out all the dust from our dusty soul. Other times God lets him bite us hard so that we may seek refuge in Him. God is constantly calling us close to Him, but we usually stray away and will run to Him only when we are in danger. When man becomes one with God, there is no place for the evil one to enter and there is no reason for God to permit him to tempt us so that we may take refuge in Him. Whatever is the case, the devil can benefit us; he helps us become holy. This is the reason that God tolerates him.

God has given freedom not only to human beings but also to the demons, because they do not and cannot damage the human soul; unless of course we ourselves want to harm our soul. On the contrary, evil or careless people, who unwillingly harm us, provide a gain for our soul. Why do you think the Abba says, "Take away temptations and no one will be saved"?[9] Temptations can do us great good. Not that the devil can ever do good – since he is all evil – but our Good God blocks the stone he throws at us to break our head, puts it in our hand, and gives us a handful of almonds to crack and eat! God, in other words, allows temptations not because He wants the devil to torment us, but in order for us to take in this way our "exams" for the next life and have no unreasonable expectations for the Second Coming. We must realize that we are at war, and we have to go on fighting against the

9. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Evagrios, p. 54:5.



devil himself as long as we are alive. During this lifetime, we've got a lot of work to do to improve our souls, but we also have the right to take spiritual exams. If we die without having passed the test, there will be no other chance. There will be no make ups!

### *The Devil Does Not Want to Repent*

The Good Lord created Angels, but some of them fell because of pride and became demons. God created man, His perfect creation, to replace the fallen Order of Angels. This is why the devil is so very jealous of man, God's creature. The demons are always complaining, "We erred only once and You are still punishing us, but they who err so many times, You always forgive them." Yes, but people repent, while they, who were Angels once and then became demons, do not repent and, instead they become even more cunning and malicious and have set on destroying God's creatures with a vengeance. Lucifer was the most luminous Order of Angels. And in the end, because of their pride, they distanced themselves from God, thousands of years ago, and continue to do so, remaining unrepentant. If they would only say, *Lord, have mercy on us*, God would do something for them. If only they cried once, "We have sinned." But they don't. If the devil were to cry out "I have sinned," he would become an Angel again. God's love knows no bounds. But the devil has a strong will, obstinacy, egoism and does not want to relent; he does not want to be saved. How horrible! And he used to be an Angel!

– Geronda, does the devil remember his previous state?

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– Of course he does. He is infuriated, because he doesn't want others to become Angels and replace him. And he is getting worse. As time goes by, he is becoming more malicious and jealous.

If only we could feel the state of misery of the devil, we would be weeping for him day and night! Even when you see a decent person become a criminal, you feel so sad. Imagine what we would feel if we were to see, not what has happened to a man, but to an Angel. Once a Monk[10] felt such pity for the demons that he knelt down and prayed as follows: "You are God, and if You want, You can find a way to save these wretched demons, who, while they had known such great glory before, they now possess all the malice and devilishness of the world, and had it not been for Your protection, they would have destroyed us all." And while he was saying these words, praying with pain, he sees a dog's head appear next to him, sticking his tongue out and mocking him. It seems that God allowed that to happen in order to inform the Monk that He is ready to accept the demons if they only repent, but they have no desire to be saved.

You see, the Fall of Adam was countered with God's coming to earth, the Incarnation. The devil's fall can be countered only if he is humbled. But he cannot be corrected, because he does not want to. Do you know how much Christ would rejoice if that were to happen? It's the same with man; he cannot be corrected if he does not want to.

– Geronda, does the devil know that God is Love, and that He loves him, and yet, despite that, is not willing to abandon his schemes?

10. It was confirmed later that this monk was Elder Paisios himself.



– Of course he knows! But his pride does not allow him to repent. He is also cunning and is now trying to win over people. He is thinking to himself: "If I get more and more followers, at the end, God will be forced to have mercy on all His creatures and He will take me in too!" This is what he is thinking. And that is why he wants to gain more and more followers. Do you see what he is up to? He is saying to himself: "I have so many people on my side that God will have to show mercy on me too." He wants God's mercy, but he does not want to repent! Didn't Judas do the same thing? Judas knew that Christ would liberate the dead from Hades. But he said to himself, "I will get there before Christ does so that He will liberate me too!" Do you see how cunning he was? Instead of asking Christ for forgiveness, he went and hanged himself. And you know that God's mercy bent the fig tree, but Judas raised his feet so that they would not touch the ground, and he died. And he did all that to avoid saying even one "Have mercy on me." What a dreadful thing! Similarly, the devil, the master of selfishness and pride, does not confess that he has sinned, but continues to work hard to increase the number of his followers.

### *Humility Destroys the Devil*

Humility has great power and destroys the devil. It is the strongest shock that we can give the devil. Where there is humility there is no place for him. And where there is no devil, there are, of course, no temptations. Once an ascetic pressed a devil to recite, *Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.* The devil said, *Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal*, but he

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did not say, *have mercy on us*. The ascetic insisted, "Say, *have mercy on us*." But to no avail! Had he complied, he would have become an Angel again. The devil will say anything except for, *have mercy on me*, because this requires humility. To say, *have mercy on me* requires humility indeed, and the soul receives the requested great mercy from God, our Good Father.

No matter what we do, we need humility, love and nobility. Things are simple. It is we that make them difficult. To the extent possible, we must do what is difficult for the devil and easy for man. Love and humility are difficult for the devil and easy for man. Even a sickly man who cannot become an ascetic can defeat the devil with humility. In just one second man can become either an angel or a devil. How? By choosing pride or choosing humility. Do you think it took hours for Lucifer to turn from an Angel into a devil? Not at all; it only took him a few seconds! The easiest way for us to be saved is through love and humility. That is why we must start with love and humility, and then go on to the rest.

Pray that we might continuously give joy to Christ and distress to the devil, since the devil happens to like hell so much that he does not want to repent.

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## His message

First we believe in God and then we love God and His image, the man. Faith increases with prayers. "Add us faith".

"As i have realised all evil comes from unfaithfulness. When someone doesn't believe in God he wants to have fun. So he falls into every kind of sin".

"People must understand the deepest meaning of life that is, that this life is given to prepare us for the future life. The people must find a guide, a religius guide, as the ones who need a guide when they travels. Then with the help of the religius guide people will programme their life, with a little study, a little prayer and avoiding the causes of sin and the wordly thinking which is the worst of all. So their heart will be devoted to Christ".

"We must wrestle with mettle to save ourselves and not to pain Christ. Christ will tell us "My child i have done so many things to save you. I have shed my blood and i have gone through passion, what have you done to save yourself?"

"Each person must find his inclination. The hard-working person, either in married life or in monastic, will be successful".

"We should prefer sadness and accept it more than we accept happiness. The bitter medicine is usually better than the sweet because it cures. Real happiness springs from pain".

"What prevents people from succeding in his spiritual life is the fact that he uses his brain not to improve his spiritual life but to do other things".

"We must feel the pain for our present state to be able to pray with all our heart".

"Now it is the time to seperate the kids from the lambs, the faithful fom the unfaithful. Later there will be time when we take examinations and

suffer persecation for our faith and copper will be separated from gold".

"When somebody is troubled because he suffers for other, cares for other, makes their problems his own problems then he will get the pay of a martyr. How lovely are the people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems and their face shines because they are filled with God's joy".

"The basis of our spiritual life is to think of the others first and then of ourselves. When we get into the others place and understand them then we are related to Christ".

"God's grace is an expensive thing. It must find the person who spiritually agrees with God to come and stay in his heart. And of course the person must work hard to get it, while we want God's grace to come and release us from weaknesses without struggling for it".

"It takes lots of sacrifice, self denial, modesty mettle to make the Holy Ghost come and stay in people's hearts. Spiritual life isn't enjoyment. Christ has put the plug but our wires are rusty and they don't get God's grace. We should remove the rust from our wires, struggle to know ourselves, stop passions and get the virtues to make God's grace visit us".

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